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Fairfield's Water Theme: a Student's Experience

By Samantha Porter

I became involved in the Fairfield University "Water" theme as a sophomore, during the first semester it was offered. I was initially intrigued by the idea of a project involving a topic in which I was already very much invested.

At the time, my understanding and appreciation of water was ecological and biological. I was interested in the environmental aspect of water, and I wanted to be involved in the two-year water journey. What I was not aware of, however, was the opportunities it would present to me and how it would change my way of thinking in the process.

As a biology major, I was very familiar with the biological importance of water; without it, there would be no life. What amazed me, though, was how the initiative taught me to explore new ways to think about, and to appreciate, water.

Water is not only biologically important – it shapes lives and cultures. Water makes art; water inspires art. Water feeds the masses and cleanses us. Water causes war and conflict. I learned to see water in things that are not inherently "watery" but are a result of water nonetheless.

The theme, through an array of lectures, panel discussions, art demonstrations, and film screenings, allowed me to widen my understanding of water and, ultimately, the world around me. The "Water" theme also allowed me to watch my peers and professors share their impressions and understanding of water, further exposing me to new ways of thinking outside my strictly biological mindset. It also provided the opportunity to pursue independent research in the field in which I am most passionate.

In my final semester at Fairfield University, with the support of my professors and through the "Inter-



Olivia Fox and Samantha Porter, right, present their Water Research Projects at the Student Research Symposium 2016.

disciplinary Water Research Seminar" course, I conducted an experiment investigating the effects of naturally occurring bacteria in fermented food upon exposure to *Vibrio* strains. The experiment and research I conducted made me better understand the severity of water-borne epidemics such as cholera in poverty stricken nations. It also made me think more deeply about how simple water sanitation is underappreciated in wealthy nations such as our own.

This initiative has shaped me into a more knowledgeable, mindful individual, one who is aware of issues regarding water in my own country but also issues on a global scale. This whole-person growth that I have experienced truly encompasses the Jesuit value of *cura personalis* that is central to the Fairfield University mission. As a graduate of the class of 2016, my education and experiences at Fairfield University, and especially my involvement in the "Water" theme, have made me confident in my ability to enter the professional world having developed a global awareness and an environmental consciousness.

Samantha Porter, class of 2016, majored in biology at Fairfield University.